

Citizens
Coalition for
Equal Access



March 6, 2012

State Senator Toni Harp, Co-Chair
State Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chair
Appropriations Committee
Room 2700, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Office of Protection and Advocacy for Disabled Persons functions with amazing efficiency (given its very small staff for the job they do) and effectiveness as evidenced by the accomplishments detailed in the annual report and by testimony of the families of those who need and have been protected against abuse, cruelty and arbitrary authority (e.g. scream rooms). This success has been possible because of a devoted, well prepared and experienced staff. But the work of the OP&A depends, fundamentally, on its independence.

The OP&A already is "merged" in the sense of having "back office" support from State administrative agencies for purchasing of supplies, etc. There are no more costs to be saved by further merger of "front office" essential investigative and advocacy efforts of this agency.

To function effectively, the OP&A must be independent. Subjection to any other State authority would undermine its credibility. We cannot let this happen.


Further, as a matter of common sense, does anyone want to force a merger and thereby lose some \$3.2 million in Federal funds?


The latest merger proposal does not mitigate any of the above concerns. At some point, this kind of pressure must be seen as harassment, preventing the very able Director, James McGaughey and his fine staff from getting on with the work they should be doing, instead of spending hours writing replies to ward off merger threats from an over zealous "Reorganization-bent" Administration.

All signatories to this letter are members of the Citizens Coalition For Equal Access, a grass roots advocacy group that has been working toward accessibility and inclusion for all people with limited mobility. Many of us are severely disabled and often feel disenfranchised by the "abled" majority. It is important and reassuring to know that we have a voice in State government that safeguards our interests. We urge you to preserve that voice by keeping OP&A an independent agency.

Sincerely,

Members of CC=A

 Co-Chair
KEITH MULLINAR

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CC=A

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